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Michele Desmarais, Faculty Spotlight

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Michele Desmarais

Engagement Spotlights

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Thank you for all you do for your community!

Community engagement and service are fundamental components of UNO's identity.

Dr. Michele Desmarais exemplifies UNO's commitment to community engagement.

Additional Resources

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Michele Desmarais, Ph.D., is one of the founders of the UNO organization SPHRS.

Spirituality, Public Health, and Religious Studies (SPHRS)

In 2014, Associate Professor, Dr. Michele Desmarais, Assistant Professor, Dr. Curtis Hutt, and UNO Religious Studies Department Chair, Dr. Paul Williams, founded SPHRS. With the UNO Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (Weitz CEC) opening, it was the perfect opportunity to pull together an array of fractured community engagement activities and events. "The goal was to create and support a broad understanding of spirituality and wellness," with core values of service, partnership, healing, respect, and sustainability. Whether someone is talking about spirituality or wellness, Dr. Desmarais believes that "it is all about having meaning in life and expressing that meaning, and what gives us meaning is being in partnership and community with other people as we are social beings."

Dr. Desmarais has built successful partnerships with the Sienna Francis House and Omaha Healing Arts by offering her expertise. These partnerships give experts in the human right field, like Dr. Desmarais, the opportunity to offer their expertise in the form of workshops, meditation, service learning projects, or other forms of ongoing support. "One of the things that has made SPHRS different is we go into application with a commitment to deep listening and compassion." The organization is focused on the education and teaching of compassion for different forms of spirituality, religion, and wellness.

Through her research and SPHRS, Dr. Desmarais has found that compassion is more critical than self-esteem. As such, the organization uses compassion in all they do. In fact, Dr. Desmarais teaches a UNO service-learning course on compassion. The service-learning course, *Finding a Voice at the Sienna House*, connected students with clients at the Sienna Francis House, encouraging each person to write a message of hope, passion, and intent with personal meaning. This project was called *Beads of Intention*. "One amazing part of the service-learning compassion class is that students who helped in the Fall course turned up in the Spring to help SPHRS at the UNO library's De-Stress Fest. They helped with the same Beads of Intention project, but this time, of course, the participants were other students." While learning about compassion, the students displayed compassion at the Sienna Francis House for clients in need, and for UNO students. Other activities to educate and promote spirituality and wellness have included morning meditations and poetry reading as a guest with the Native American Prime-time Family Reading Series.

"Compassion is value, bridging the gap between different cultures and religions."

UNO Department of Religious
Studies

UNO College of Arts and Sciences

Changing Minds

Share Your Story:

Did you organize or participate in a community-oriented project or service? UNO wants to hear from you!

UNO is committed to community engagement in its broadest form, and wants to feature your community service story.

[Click here](#) to share your story.



Finding a Voice at
the Sienna House,
Beads of Intention
Project

Dr. Michele Marie Desmarais is an Associate Professor in Religious Studies and a member of the Native American Studies Faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). She is past editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her book, *Changing Minds*, was included as one of 250 foundational texts in the field of Science and Religion by the [International Society for Science and Religion](#).

Read more about Dr. Desmarais by reading her full [UNO profile](#).

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